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ABSTRACT

The increased competition for public funds will soon make inter-agency cooperation a necessity. In particular, the merging of school and public libraries will result in a reduction in duplication of services and savings in the areas of personnel services, building space, and acquisition of materials. The planned high school for Anderson County is expected to become a community school complex with shared facilities for use by all age groups in the County. (STS)

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PROPOSAL FOR A COMBINED PUBLIC AND SCHOOL LIBRARY

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ABSTRACT

The Anderson County School System of Clinton, Tennessee, is in the process of consolidating two high schools into a community school complex. This school complex is to be developed to serve an entire community of all age groups from preschool age children to senior citizens. The feeling is that a school should be more than just a place for meetings and school activities and that it should offer community services such as Day Care, Adult Education and re-education, recreation, etc. The library media center should also be the heart throb of the community rather than just the hub of the school. Such an approach would mean that public agencies of the community such as the public library would need to cooperate with the school system to better the community service and share expenses. The primary goal is to involve the community in activities of its own and in all school activities, thereby merging thoughts and actions and creating a closer relationship.

PROPOSAL FOR A COMBINED PUBLIC AND SCHOOL LIBRARY

I am a native East Tennessean and I grew up in the coal mining areas of Appalachia. My formal public elementary and secondary education took place in the coal mining camps of East Tennessee, and I never had the assistance of a professional librarian until I enrolled in college. In fact, the libraries of the small schools that I attended had very few books in their collection, but I believe that I read every book that the schools owned including the encyclopedias and the dictionaries.

During the time that I attended public schools I read anything available including the dime novels, weekly western magazines, the Tom Swift books and as many of the Zane Grey books that were available. Even though I have always been an avid sports fan and for some time a participator in the field of athletics, much of my time during each school year was devoted to reading. Reading for me has many more benefits than watching a program on television because, while reading, my mind was and still is involved with whatever is happening in the book. Tom Sawyer was one of my favorites; I read it more than once, but while reading the book I lived in those times. I could smell the Mississippi and shared the same happiness and fears that the heroes felt during their experiences. Television viewing does not provide the same experiences as reading, and I do believe that when we get our youth reading again because they want to and enjoy it, then we will be solving some of the problems we have in education today.

In remembering how I fared in public education of the 1930's and 1940's, I do recall that all I did in school was read. My teachers in the seventh and eighth grades were either apathetic, disinterested or lazy because we were

given permission to leave the room when things were dull or did not apply to our class. It was usually my decision to leave almost all classes because I enjoyed sitting quietly someplace with a book. As a result of spending practically all my time reading, it might be expected that my grades would be poor, and they were--so low that I overheard two of my teachers saying that I could not make it to high school. In those days the county school system gave county-wide tests to determine who could be promoted to high school. I did well on the test because much of it was concerned with reading. My teachers did not believe the results, and I was given another test with the results being better than the previous test. I was sent to high school, and I continued to read all the available books at the neglect of my other school work, the result being that my first report card from the local high school was very bad. The things my father said cannot be repeated here, but I can say that he gave me motivation. Consequently, my report card improved.

Today I am speaking to a group of librarians and I don't know why. In my experience as a superintendent and administrator of a small rural school system, I have had problems with only two groups of educators: English teachers and librarians. The English teachers did not like the books that I read nor did they like the books that I believed that youngsters should read. It is my feeling that reading is good for students and adults and that any reading is better than no reading. As far as the librarians were concerned, I have always felt that they were following a routine or pattern that was adopted when they first started working. In fact, it is my opinion that English teachers and librarians are the slowest group of educators to change their methods and their thinking.

Even though I have had problems with librarians, I am a great believer in the public school library program and I have promoted school library programs in the Anderson County School System. I think that one of the reasons that I promote and believe in library programs is the fact that during the period (the Depression years) that I grew up, there was very little reading material in any home or in any schools of Appalachia. There was also few professional librarians. It is probably true that I missed a part of my education by not having books and materials available. So I say today that I support librarians and the support services that they can give to the education of our youth.

It is my intention to bring to you some of the Anderson County School System's ideas concerning libraries and media services. One of our ideas is involved with the consolidation of two high schools and the development of a new community school which can serve preschoolers, students and adults. Consolidation and community school ideas are not new, but making the school completely available to the community is something that our staff wants to see occur as a result of consolidation. Our feeling is that a community school is more than just a place for meetings and school activities and that it can be utilized for adult education and re-education, Day Care activities, recreation, senior citizen groups, drama and art activities. It is also our feeling that the library and media services can be the heart throb of a community and that the services can be offered to all people of the community from preschoolers to senior citizens. If a school can offer a variety of services that the community is interested in, it will probably happen that our electorate will take more interest in the school program and its activities and possibly help

us in future bond referendums and the providing of operating funds. I do not feel that we can return fully to the community school of old because today's schools are much larger. While schools are larger, there is much more that can be offered to our communities and, particularly, if schools and public libraries work together for a greater community service.

At this time I do not know how many public school and public libraries have been combined in this country, but I believe that the idea is good. A school-community library that can serve all of the community during the daylight and evening hours can be beneficial to the student who takes a full load during the day and to the adult who is busy during the day or the evening. Personnel can be staggered so that professional services are available most of the time; but due to the slowness of change that I mentioned before, librarians prefer working the same hours even if two are on the same staff. It just makes sense for the day to be extended to take care of those students and adults who have difficulty with regular hours. Neither can I see why the books, the different media and the librarian's services of both school and community libraries cannot be combined for better, less expensive utilization.

In Anderson County, Tennessee, the public schools operate the largest library system with the county outside of Oak Ridge having twenty-four different libraries or media centers with books, media and materials available for a certain age group, but each library could have a collection for the full entire community age group. It is interesting to note that in Clinton there is one community library and four school libraries all in walking distance of each other. In these library centers there is most likely a great deal of duplication existing and this seems expensive and wasteful. Cooperatively, there is no end to the library and media services that can be made available

for any community. The question might be asked why the public library system and school systems should be interested in cooperating for the offering of services to a community? There are some good reasons as far as school systems are concerned and the same situations would probably exist in many parts of our county. These reasons are as follows:

1) Personnel services are becoming too expensive for communities to afford duplication.

2) Building space is becoming scarce and very difficult to replace.

3) Books, media and materials have to be purchased at inflation prices.

Today there is heated competition for public funds and it looks like the competition will be even greater in the future. To be frank with you who are public librarians, I believe that schools will continue to get the largest share of the public dollar because education groups have the big political clout. I know that this is true in Anderson County but it is fortunate that our people, including educators, believe in libraries and the services they offer.

The main problem of cooperation between the public library system and the schools are the people in control. I have said that librarians are slow to change, but in all fairness it should be said that school administrators are slow to relinquish control. The building principal would find it hard to accept the idea of sharing control with most groups. I must believe that school and library personnel and the boards of control over libraries and schools can accept ideas that are good for communities. Cooperation as I see it means that both groups want to and most certainly they have to be willing. I have told our administration on many occasions that they can do

what they want to do and they can do it, especially if it is concerned with athletics. As far as cooperation with public libraries is concerned it is my feeling that the services offered is the thing of importance and not who is in control of the service.

The Anderson County Board of Education is in the process of planning for a new high school and it is the feeling of the board and the staff that such a school should be a community school with the whole county being the community. We want to offer the best in the way of library services and this would include a building that is planned to serve the entire citizenry of the community. The types of books, media, materials, etc., that meet the needs of all our citizens should receive priority attention.

It goes without saying that our system is most interested in cooperating with the public library system in this project and in other library endeavors. Are you as public librarians ready for this idea of cooperation for community services? If you are not ready, I believe that you will be soon because the difficulties involved with obtaining building and operating funds is going to mandate full cooperation among all those offering community services.

In closing I would like to explain that my reason for arriving at a new spirit of cooperation with other agencies is that schools, in particular, need to get parents involved with the schools again since there has been a general drop in the lack of confidence in public schools and other public agencies. I seek to improve our school system's image with the people of our community.